

Freshford House
Redcliffe Way
Bristol
BS1 6NL

T 08456 40 40 40
enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk
www.ofsted.gov.uk

Direct T 0117 9456293
Direct F 0117 9456554
Susan.wootton@ofsted.gov.uk



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Mrs Joyce Thacker
Strategic Director for Children and Young People's Services
Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
1st Floor
Norfolk House
Walker Place
Rotherham
S65 1AS

Dear Mrs Thacker

Annual unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within Rotherham children's services

This letter contains the findings of the recent unannounced inspection of contact, referral and assessment arrangements within local authority children's services in Rotherham council which was conducted on 4 and 5 August 2009. The inspection was carried out under section 138 of the Education and Inspections Act 2006. It will contribute to Ofsted's annual review of the performance of the authority's children's services, for which Ofsted will award a rating later in the year.

The inspection identified three areas for priority action and a number of areas for development, which are detailed below.

The inspection sampled the quality and effectiveness of contact, referral and assessment arrangements and their impact on minimising the incidence of child abuse and neglect. Inspectors considered a range of evidence, including: electronic case records; supervision files and notes; observation of social workers and senior practitioners undertaking referral and assessment duties; and other information provided by staff and managers. Inspectors also spoke to a range of staff including managers, social workers, other practitioners and administrative staff. I am grateful to you and your staff for your help and the time given during this inspection.

From the evidence gathered, the inspection identified a number of areas where the contact, referral and assessment arrangements were delivered satisfactorily in accordance with national guidance, in particular:

- The access team provides a consistent response to initial contacts and gathers relevant information before passing the information to the locality teams.



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- The out of hours service is staffed by suitably qualified and experienced staff and, in addition to responding to emergency referrals, undertakes 'welfare visits' in appropriate cases.
- The council is taking positive steps to respond to the needs of the Slovak Roma community.
- The co-location of health and social care professionals is starting to provide opportunities for direct staff communication on individual cases.

From the evidence gathered, the following strengths and areas for development were also identified:

Strengths
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The children with disabilities specialist team undertake contact, referral and assessment responsibilities effectively.
Areas for development
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The performance in respect of the completion of initial assessments and core assessments is inconsistent and often significantly delayed. ▪ The level and quality of formal supervision is considerably below that stated in the council's supervision policy. ▪ The initial response to contacts across the localities is variable with a high level of 'no further action' decisions being taken. ▪ There is no evidence, from the cases seen, that the use of the Common Assessment Framework (CAF) is having significant impact.

This visit has identified the following areas for priority action:

Area(s) for priority action
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The wide range of work undertaken by social workers in localities undermines their capacity to deliver effective services to safeguard vulnerable children. ▪ Performance management systems and auditing policies do not ensure that local and senior managers are able to fully exercise their decision-making and supervisory responsibilities in respect of contact, referral and assessment processes. ▪ Information systems do not appear to provide up to date and accurate information on all contacts and referrals and the status of investigations, assessments and plans. Reduced email 'in box' capacity for managers adversely affects the timely and appropriate transfer of case information on vulnerable children.

The areas for priority action identified above will be specifically considered in any future inspection of services to safeguard children within your area.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Heather Brown", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Heather Brown
Divisional Manager, Social Care Safeguarding

Copy: Mr Mike Cuff, Chief Executive, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Mrs Judith Dodd, Chair of Rotherham Safeguarding Children Board
Mr Shaun Wright, Lead Member for Children's Services, Rotherham Metropolitan Borough Council
Andrew Spencer, Department for Children, Schools and Families